

Unit 1

Newspapers : The Cheapest Medium

The Definition of News

The word “**news,**” presumably, results from the combination of N (North), E (East), W (West) and S (South) in which each individual direction indicates the four comers of the world. More concretely, news is a report of a series of facts, changes or events happening in a certain area that is presented journalistically and immediately to inform or interest the wider reader. However, not every event that takes place each day is news. Only the incident that grasps the public’s attention and criticism can be news. In addition, the situation that is meaningful to a certain audience is also considered as news because the definition of news is elusive. News is “**man bites dog**” stuff, news is something people have not known or a continuation of stories they have heard before, and news is what editors and their staff say it is.’

The Ingredients of News

News always attracts people’s attention, curiosity and criticism because of its complex nature: be it interesting, informative, entertaining, convincing or giving knowledge to its audience. There are many kinds of news events. Yet, people do not read every news story because of many reasons.

¹ Itule, Bruce D. and Douglas A. Anderson, *News Writing and Reporting for Today’s Media*, 3rd ed., New York : MC Graw- Hill, 1994, p.28.

In each newspaper, there are basically two kinds of news events, namely:

Hards news events are the killings and important news stories that are timely and are reported almost automatically by most newspapers, radio stations, and television outlets, such as a murder, a big drugs seizure or the speeches of leading government officials.

Soft news events are those stories which are not so immediately important or timely to a wide audience.* such as a lunch to honor a retiring school custodian or a car wash by fourth-graders to raise money for a classmate with AIDS.

What Makes News?

Newsworthiness may be judged by the following criteria:

1. Freshness or timeliness
2. Proximity or closeness to the home of the audience
3. Conflict
4. Eminence and promise
5. Consequence and impact
6. Human interest

Besides, newsworthiness may also result from the following factors:

1. The editor's and reporters' basic instinct
2. The audience themselves

²Itule, p. 28.

3. The available space in the newspaper or the “news hole”
4. Availability of news
5. Philosophy of the medium, for instance, in Thailand, *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* may have a different philosophy in their news reporting.
6. Pressure from the publisher
7. Influence of advertisers
8. News mix
9. Competition among media
10. Changing demographics³

The Qualifications of a Good Reporter or Journalist for an English Newspaper

A good reporter or journalist should possess some of the following qualifications:

1. He should have a **college** or university education.
2. He may or may not hold a degree in Journalism, but in another field such as English, History, Political Science, etc.
3. He should have actual writing experience.
4. He may have or may not have experience in newspaper work.
5. He should be available to go anywhere and at anytime.
6. He should have good human relationship with others.
7. He should have good command of English, especially in writing.

³ Itule, p. 36.

8. He should have a talent and a will to go beyond others in the search for news.

The Elements of News Stories

It is true that not every news story is accepted in a newspaper. If a reporter wants his news story to be printed, and especially to get a byline or title line, he should be highly competitive and have a good judgement of what constitutes news.

Following is what a reporter should master when he/she writes a news story:

1. Report only the facts of an event.
2. Write with accuracy and precision.
3. Be economical by using words economically and avoid wordiness.
4. Write with clarity.
5. Be specific about what is written.
6. Write with succinctness.
7. Be enthusiastic about what is written.
8. Develop an angle for the news report to attract the editor to accept the story.
9. Avoid ambiguity and redundancy.
10. Be objective and neutral.

The Classifications of News

Newspapers are classified into dailies and weeklies. In the USA there are about 1,585 daily and 8,000 weekly newspapers.⁴ In each daily or weekly newspapers printed in Thailand, news is presented in any of the following aspects:

1. Regional news approach, such as Local News, Home News, Regional News, Foreign News or World News
2. The length of the news stories varies as in briefs or news in detail.
3. The contents of news may be as in the following categories:
 - 3.1 Political News
 - 3.2 Economic and Financial News
 - 3.3 Business News
 - 3.4 Social News, news captions and News from the Royal Household Bureau
 - 3.5 Sports News
 - 3.6 General News such as Environment News
 - 3.7 Science and Education News⁵
 - 3.8 Crime News
 - 3.9 Accident News

⁴ Itule, p. 4.

⁵ สวาสดิ์ พรรณา, *วิธีอ่านและแปลข่าวหนังสือพิมพ์ภาษาอังกฤษ*, กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักพิมพ์โอเคียน สโตร์, 2534 หน้า 9.

The Format of News Writing

Each news story usually consists of the following parts:

1. The Headline
2. The Lead
3. The Body

(*See Unit 2 for more explanation.)

The Reasons why Students Should Read English Newspapers

A newspaper is a form of mass media that serves as the eyes and ears of their audiences.⁶ Among all the media, which includes the radio, television, magazines, public relations, advertising, photojournalism and electronic communication, like the world wide web or e-mail system, newspapers are the cheapest medium that reaches the widest audience. Accordingly, reading an English newspaper provides sources of information in such fields as economics, business, environment, geography, history, politics, religion, education, culture, world population, entertainment, sports and so on, especially as the world has now been greatly affected by information technology which has resulted in the globalization era. With the advancement of information technology, what happens in one corner of the world has reached the other in just a few seconds. Hence mass media have made the world a global village. Likewise, newspapers play an important role in people's information consumption by furnishing and equipping the audience with current information which will influence their perception toward society and the world at large. As for the Thai audience, reading an English newspaper such as *The Bangkok Post*, and *The Nation*, which are

⁶ Itule, p. 58.

the two main English newspapers in Thailand, will provide them an opportunity to catch up with the world's changes and movements and phenomena because there are more than 1.50 stories on a huge variety of subjects in these newspapers.⁷ However, these types of news stories, according to Terry Fredickson, usually repeat themselves. For example, the reports of floods and fires which have repeatedly occurred. Therefore the news vocabulary in such stories is quite simple for the reader. It is not too difficult for them, then to master news reading and writing skills.

Activities

⁷ *Teaching English with the Bangkok Post*, Bangkok: Post Publishing Plc., 1995, p. 19.

*Exercise 1. What is your **definition** of news?*

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*Exercise 2. What is or are the **hard news event(s)** you have read recently?*

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*Exercise 3. Tell your classmates about the **soft news events** you have read in a newspaper.*

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*Exercise 4. What do you think is or are the other **qualification(s)** of a good journalist?*

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*Exercise 5. What do you think is or are the other important **element(s)** of news writing?*

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Exercise 6. Among these three parts of a news report, which part do you think is the most important? Why?

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Exercise 7. What do you think is or are the advantage(s) of reading an English newspaper?

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